

Sunday School

TRUE AND FALSE BROTHERHOOD.

Acts 4:32, 5:11.

February 7, 1909.

Golden Text:

Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.—Prov. 12:22.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 41. Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 4:32, 5:11. T.—2 Kings 5:15-27.
W.—Psalm 52. Th.—Prov. 12:13-22.
F.—James 3:1-10. S.—Psa'm 139:1-12.
S.—Eph. 4:25-32.

LESSON COMMENTS.

In this lesson we see two typical men; Barnabas stands for truth and loyalty, Ananias for hypocrisy and falsehood.

Barnabas is introduced as a Levite from Cyprus, having land. When he gave himself to Jesus he made a full surrender of self and substance. He held back nothing. He sold his land and gave the price to the cause of Jesus.

It is bad logic to argue from this act of Barnabas the obligation of communion as contended for today. Under the emergency of that special period some men were moved to sell their goods and distribute to the poor. But this was not to be the law under ordinary conditions. In the words of the fourth commandment God recognizes the righteousness of individual ownership and control of property.

We find Barnabas mentioned in Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:22-30; 12:25, and in chapters 13, 14, 15.

Barnabas was the Hebrew surname given him by his brethren. It means Son of Consolation. The Holy Ghost is the great paraclete, the Comforter. The word Barnabas in Greek is expressed by the phrase son of paracletis, a word of the same root as paraclete. So Barnabas and the Holy Ghost have almost the same title.

The story of Barnabas shows the different kinds of men that God uses: Paul, Peter, James and John, logical, impetuous, practical, philosophical, and Barnabas, the tender hearted.

Again we see in the case of Barnabas the marked coupling of names and characters, one man complementing another, and the two mutually helpful in sympathy and watchfulness. The seventy go out by twos; the twelve are named in couplets, and we have Paul and Barnabas.

The book of the Acts shows the agency of Barnabas in giving the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was pre-eminently the apostle of the Gentiles. But when not long after his conversion he returned to Jerusalem and assayed to join himself to the disciples and the whole band of Christians were slow to receive him, it was Barnabas that took Paul and brought him to the apostles and declared how he had seen the Lord in the way. The Gentiles have Barnabas to thank for Paul. The city of Antioch was stirred to its depths and Barnabas was sent to see about it. He came and saw the grace of God, and went to Tarsus and found Saul and brought him to Antioch, where together they labored a whole year. The efficiency of Paul in his earlier ministry was more than we know, perhaps due to the presence of Barnabas.

The Lycaonians called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius, because Paul was the chief speaker. This gives the heathen view as to the grace and dignity of Barnabas.

There has always been crying need for the ministry of Barnabas. All men are open now and then to the word of consolation. Among the poor widows and orphans of Jerusalem

Barnabas would find a wide field for his peculiar service. Paul himself strong in conviction would find the words of Barnabas grateful. Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. 'Twas doubtless the hand of Barnabas that lifted him from the ground and the words of Barnabas that brought strength and comfort to his heart. Many a downcast Christian feels an uplift from the son of consolation. In this service, Barnabas is like the Son of God. Jesus said: "The Son of the Lord God is upon me, for he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted." Jesus never breaks the bruised reed and we may be sure that Barnabas, like his Master, goes forth pouring out the oil of joy, and there is no ministry more acceptable or divine. Would you belong to the brotherhood of Barnabas? Luke's comment about him was pointed: "He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost." You need not be an ordained preacher. Barnabas got his surname before his ordination. You need not be much learned or a great orator. A fellow feeling for suffering and distress is what you need. Pray for the mantle of Barnabas.

Directly opposite to the spirit of Barnabas was that of Ananias and Sapphira. Barnabas was true; Ananias was false. Barnabas surrendered all to Jesus; Ananias pandered to his own vanity. Barnabas was sincere; Ananias was a hypocrite.

The crime of Ananias was hypocrisy combined with vanity. He wanted credit for complete self-abnegation while holding on to the world. He was endeavoring to draw tribute from both God and Mammon, but his doom proved that he could not serve two masters.

The question is raised concerning the severity of the punishment inflicted on Ananias and Sapphira. We cannot fail to note that Peter, through whom the death sentence was pronounced, had himself denied Jesus with cursing and swearing. And all through the years men have committed apparently worse crimes and gone unpunished.

One reason why Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead is, that this was the beginning of a new dispensation. Ananias was something like a sign-board at the beginning of a long road. Through him God called all the ages to see the crime of lying to the Holy Ghost. For a similar reason Uzzah was smitten down at the beginning of a new era in Israel's life. So were Nadab and Abihu, Hophni and Phinehas. These are conspicuous examples of the danger of trifling with God.

Again the sin of Ananias was prominent because it was during the time of the special outpouring of the Holy Ghost. It was a period of unusual grace and the sin that marred such a period was unusually heinous. Peter's sin was committed suddenly, without deliberation. The sin of Ananias was deliberate, planned and plotted and under the awful light of the Holy Ghost. In early Jewish history Achan showed the same covetous spirit, and with his life he paid the penalty of his sin. The fate of Achan, as with trumpet blast, calls the attention of the world to the sin of covetousness. Ananias in the opening days of the new dispensation takes his place by the side of Achan, and through him God challenges the attention of the world.

In the lesson before us Peter perhaps did not know what would be the fate of Ananias. He was the one that brought the sin to light, but Ananias died under the hand of God. His death is an awful monument to the sin of falsehood, and it calls upon every one today to speak the truth in his heart.

The root of his sin was his love for money and applause. He had the opportunity to crucify this love, but it rose above him, became his master and blasted his life. His lust conceived and brought forth sin, and sin brought death.

C. W. GRAFTON.

The present generation is blessed beyond any preceding one; the conveniences of life contribute, as never before, to health, comfort and progress.